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Well-Being of Returning Migrants in the Rural Northeast of Thailand: Process Oriented Methodology

*Buapun Promphakping**

Abstract: »Das Wohlergehen der zurückgekehrten Migranten im ländlichen Nordosten Thailands: Prozessorientierte Methodologie«. Migration is generally seen as a key process driving transformation, especially from a 'traditional agriculture' to a 'modern industrial society.' In Thailand, rural-urban migration has been evident for a long time. However, at present, a great number of the population is still earning its living in rural areas. The force of transformation was not enough to move Thailand beyond being a 'middle income country.' This paper explores the implication of migration on well-being of families and communities in the Northeast of Thailand. The empirical data for the analysis of this paper is drawn from a study of three rural villages in the Northeast of Thailand, carried out within a research project named "Personalising the Middle Income Trap." It will argue that along with the material transformation, returning migrants and villagers have re-prioritized their values. These values and material aspects become decisive factors in the choice of how to earn a living and therefore shape well-being outcomes. This study also found that the rich seem to be experiencing higher happiness after returning to their villages, while the poor do not experience subjective well-being in the same manner.

Keywords: Well-being, migration, process-oriented research, Northeast of Thailand.

1. Introduction¹

In development debates, migration is one of the key processes of 'structural transformation,' i.e., the change from agricultural-based structure to industrial-based structure of society (Lewis 1954). However, the striking fact is that, since the inception of modern development (after the Second World War), the

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rural sector has continued to persist, albeit with the mobility of rural people around the globe increasing. In the case of Thailand, migration from rural to industrial urban sectors of economy has been growing since the presence of industrial development in the 1960s. However, the rural sector also continued to prevail. An official report showed that over 40 percent of the labour forces of the country are employed in the agricultural sector (National Statistics Organization 2016). The persistence of the rural sector amidst the growing mobility of people around the globe in general has attested to the limitation of conventional and mainstream concepts of transformation and development which have guided research policy.

Although there is a persistence of the rural sector, change and transformation has been profound. In previous research, emphasis was placed upon material aspects of rural transformation, while non-material aspects were seen as a lower priority. In Thailand, migration from rural areas and the Northeast to Bangkok has been evident since early modern development in the 1960s (Fuller et al. 1983). This type of migration is seen to ease unemployment or underemployment in rural areas (due to population growth and scarcity of land resource). Meanwhile migration heading towards big cities will result in the lowering of labour costs in modern economies, and therefore provide opportunities for industries in big cities to grow. Given that the state-led development under the National Economics and Social Development Plan places emphasis on modern economy, growth was largely concentrated in Bangkok Metropolitan and major urban centers. In this respect, the implication of migration on transformation on rural society is essentially seen in the remittances, the trickle-down effect, migrants sent home. In Thailand, official statistics show that 12.49 percent of rural household incomes in the Northeast are derived from members who work away from home. The figure for households that are categorized as 'economically inactive' is as high as 37.7 percent (National Statistics Bureau of Thailand 2009). Money remitted by migrants was spent on agricultural inputs, building new houses, buying land, buying 'conspicuous' consuming goods, etc., and this consumption propels changes in the rural area.

It has long been argued that migration has had implications not only on inequality between rural and urban sectors, but also on interpersonal and inter-household inequality within and between villages (Lipton 1980). Inequality is not only taking the form of material wealth concentration. For Bourdieu (1984), the process that generates differentiation entails symbolic struggle – the struggle for distinction in which clusters of individual in a social space each develop cultural peculiarities. These cultural peculiarities mark them out from one another. The distinction notion of Bourdieu captures a general sense of dominant forms of judgement of taste. In the context of rural transformation, elites are more able to mobilize political or economic power and therefore a few family groups continue to persist due to their wealth (Querubin 2011). Lipton (1980) argued that the better-off households are able to finance migra-

tion, while Daloz (2010) maintains that the lower strata of elites are constantly seeking differentiation as well as separation from the rest of society. The struggle for distinction would be shaping transformation of rural village together with material aspect. The elites are able to maintain their dominance not only by their ability to command material wealth, but also by the symbolism they produce through their tastes, life-styles, and consumption.

In recent years, it has been increasingly accepted that what migrants sent home is “more than materials” or money (Levitt 2001). In the case of returning migrants, they have acquired knowledge, skills, networks and friendships through the courses of migration. Knowledge and skills were brought along when they retired and returned to their natal villages. Moreover, migration increases the means of communication and interactions between rural and urban sectors, consequently social and cultural values will be altered. The analysis of transformation and its implications must pay sufficient attention to these non-material aspects that are generated by migrants through the migration process.

This paper takes into account both material and non-material aspects of transformation to examine migration and its implication on well-being. Migration not only changes material aspects of a rural village, but also alters values and ideas. This paper argues that along with the material transformation, returning migrants and villagers re-prioritize their values. These values and material aspects become decisive factors in the choice of how to earn a living and therefore shape well-being outcomes. The empirical data for the analysis of this paper is drawn from a study of three rural villages in the Northeast of Thailand, under a research project named “Personalizing the Middle Income Trap.” This paper will first discuss the theoretical framework that guides the analysis of this study, followed by outlining the methodology used. It will then present findings and discussions.

2. Transformation, Human Well-Being and Migration

In general, transformation refers to processes of change; rural transformation is a comprehensive process whereby rural societies diversify their economies, eventually relying less on agriculture. Meanwhile rural societies become dependent on distant places to trade and to acquire goods, services, and ideas. In this process people move from dispersed villages to towns and become culturally more similar to urban agglomerations. Rural transformation processes are embedded in the wider structural process of change that involves the decline of agricultural in overall economy.

The transformation of rural Asia and its agriculture manifests four important aspects. First, the share of agricultural outputs in national GDP has been declining, however, large numbers of people remain dependent on agriculture. Official statistics reported that agriculture employed about 42 percent of labour in

Thailand, but agricultural output in GDP was only around 8 percent. Second, agricultural productivity together with land productivity of Asia has grown faster than in other developing regions. Third, technological change in agriculture since the 1960s has played a crucial role in improving the yield of traditional crops. Fourth, there is a significant shift in the composition of agricultural products of developing Asia from tradition to high value products (ADB 2013).

One important perspective guiding the analysis of rural transformation has been the dualism notion that the traditional peasant will eventually wither and be replaced by the capitalist or modern farmer. However, the form and the pace of transformation remain contentious, the thesis of dualism becoming increasingly inadequate to come to grips with the transforming world. In Asian countries, rural transformation has been driven by state-led modernization, especially through the 'green revolution.' Small producers in rural areas continue to persist, but they cannot be classified as 'tradition peasant' or 'capitalist farmers.' Agricultural production has recently been referred to as 'entrepreneurial mode of farming' (van der Ploeg²).

Methodological debates of the social sciences have long been caught between the polarization of 'individual' and 'society.' Sociological theories offer descriptions by either placing society above individuals or placing individuals above society (Elias 2001, 148). The debates have been discussing the understanding of the 'structures,' and the transformations that happened, both individually and in groups, due to the increase or reduction of their interdependence. Elias proposed a sociological theory known as 'figurational sociology' (see Morrow 2009). From the figurational sociology viewpoint, well-being needs to be considered both as the 'state' of being and the processes. This paper recognizes that these ideas are valuable for guiding the investigation and analysis of well-being of returning migrants within the context of transformation of the Northeast of Thailand.

The main distinctive feature of Elias' contribution to sociology is his emphasis on 'processes' and 'relations.' Elias places the stress on what human beings are and how *they came to be* as they are. His treatment of human beings allows on the one hand to avoid the trap of 'reductionism' to 'individuals' and 'agency,' and on the other hand the 'reification' of 'society' and 'structure.' Meanwhile both 'the individual' and 'the social' are being fully recognized, not merely as the state of being, but as being constituted in the processual.

Initially the term 'figuration' denotes an idea similar to 'culture,' such as social attitudes, practices, and beliefs, of which each culture (Indian culture, Japanese culture, etc.) has 'figurations' of its own (Benedict 1934). The figuration used by Elias is by no means to be equated to 'system,' 'culture' nor

² <<http://www.jandouwevanderploeg.com/EN/the-new-peasantries/>> (Accessed June 21, 2017).

‘structure.’ Elias (2012) uses the word figuration to refer to the fluid ties and interdependence between human beings, which cannot be simply deduced from the facts learnt through the course of life. The term figuration at its core is intended to counter the notion that ‘social agencies,’ ‘institutions,’ and ‘society’ are entities that exist somehow separately from the people who constitute them. The fluid ties and interdependencies of human beings comprise the nexuses of figurations: the shifting networks of people, shifting patterns, regularities, and directions of change, tendencies and counter-tendencies, in webs of human relationships that are always changing over time (Dunning and Hughes 2012).

The figurational formulation of Elias summarized above can guide the analysis of well-being of migrants in the transitioning context of the developing worlds in that well-being cannot be understood by disconnecting between the ‘structures’ that constrain or enable, and ‘human agencies’ in their pursuit for well-being. Transformation pertaining to rural-urban migration is not only the work of the structure, especially through remittances migrant send home. Indeed, these structures have come to exist, partly, through the contributions of individual actors. In this respect, the analysis of well-being of returning rural migrants will not only focus on well-being outcomes, but the process through which well-being was produced will also be taken into account. In the migration process, migration resulted in a dismantled rural structure, but migrants and rural people will also reshape their villages. In other words, the transformation that has taken place does not simply act as the modern replacement for the traditional structure of the rural village. While the traditional social and cultural values have disintegrated in the transformation process, people in rural areas have reprioritized things according to which they consider to be important to lead their life, and constantly change the ways they manage their capital assets in order to achieve the best possible outcomes of well-being.

As there are competing views on well-being concepts, it is necessary to mention and define well-being for the purpose of this analysis. Well-being is traditionally defined to be the state of being, comprised of objective and subjective states (Promphakping 2006). Objective dimension of well-being is largely defined as ‘need satisfiers,’ materials or conditions that enable humans to attain their desired goals. Doyal and Gough (1991), maintain that there are two ‘universal needs’ of all humans, i.e. health and autonomy. Without good (physical) health, humans will not be able to experience a good quality of life. Autonomy, on the other hand, will allow people to do or act as they wish, and to value what they see as meaningful to their lives, leading to a good quality of life. Things that ensure these needs are met, or ‘need satisfiers,’ include adequate nutritional food and water, adequate protective housing, non-hazardous work and safe physical environments, appropriate health care, security in childhood, significant primary relationships, physical and economic security,

safe birth control and childbearing, and appropriate basic and cross-cultural education (Doyal and Gough 1991, 202).

The subjective well-being is generally referred to as 'life satisfactions,' which are multidimensional, and involve affective evaluations of moods and emotions (Eid and Diener 2001, 65). The notion of subjective well-being covers a range of separate but connected concepts that influence one's satisfaction with one's life, such domains as marriage, work, income, housing, and leisure: whether one feels positive and has pleasant moods most of the time or whether one experiences negative feelings such as depression, stress, and anger; and overall, whether one judges one's life to be fulfilling and meaningful (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2002). One's overall level of happiness, how satisfied one is with the different domains of life (home, work, leisure), and one's personal assessment of those life domains, and the frequency of good and bad feelings, are increasingly common indicators of subjective well-being. Recently the happiness study (see Layard 2005) has been strongly present and recognized as somehow an aggregated indicator of subjective well-being.

One methodological proposition arisen from the concepts of well-being is the link between subjective and objective well-being. As mentioned earlier, social theories have long debated over relationships between objective and subjective conditions. Marx, for instance, maintains that the ideology or 'super structure' of a given society is shaped by its material base, or 'production' (comprised of force of production and relation of production), an idea which was challenged later. In development debates, it has long been argued that development theories give higher priority to 'economic growth' or objective conditions than to the subjective one. For the purpose of our analysis we will not try to resolve this controversial argument in this paper. Well-being in this research will follow the Well-being in Developing Countries ESRC Research Group (2007), in recognizing the 'relational aspect' of well-being. While it is important to recognize that we cannot talk about 'well-being' when people have no food, it is equally important to recognize collective well-being in that one's well-being can be undermined, impeded, or even denied by the well-being of others, thus underlining that individual and collective well-being can be mutually contradictory. Taking this into consideration, the Research Group of Wellbeing in Developing Countries (WeD) proposes to define well-being by using short and catchy words as 'having, doing, and thinking'; what do people have, what do they do with what they have and what are the meanings assigned to these?

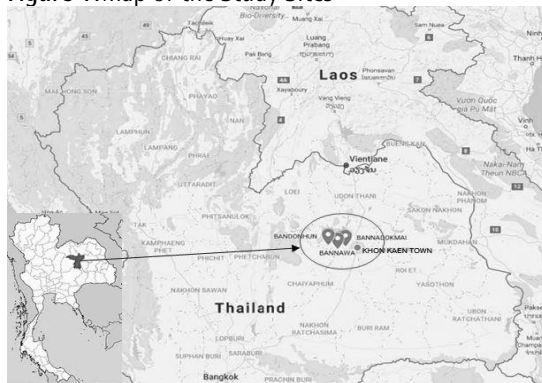
The relational aspect of well-being will be taken into account and used in the analysis of this paper. Migration is seen as an integral process that was undertaken as a means to achieve well-being, and this process became one of the impulses propelling transformation. People migrated seeking to improve their material wealth (objective well-being), meanwhile their subjective well-being was also altered. Prior to the advent of modern development, people

valued things based on the norms or beliefs of the traditional institutions. Participating in modern development through migration, things that they value have been re-prioritised, and actions undertaken in order to achieve these values are not only shaping individual well-being, but also altering traditional structure. In the perspective of this paper, this is the dismantling and reshaping within that characterized transformation process, the process in which networks of people, their communities, their ways of thinking, patterns of earning a living, and patterns of consumption are shifting. We will present these processes further in the following section.

3. Methodology

This paper derives its empirical data from the research project entitled ‘Personalizing the Middle Income Trap.’ For this research, fieldwork was conducted in Khon Kaen, a province of the Northeast of Thailand. Over the past five decades, migrants from this region have gone to work in Bangkok and other lucrative urban areas, including overseas such as Singapore, Taiwan, or South Korea. In the past two decades Khon Kaen town grew rapidly, partly driven by the ‘growth pole’ policy and partly because Khon Kaen is located on the middle of the East-West Economic Corridor, the development programme of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) called GMS – Greater Mekong Sub-region. Rural-urban migration in the Northeast has evidently taken a cyclical form. Some of migrants leave their village seasonally, a few of them, especially those who obtained a high education, stay permanently in urban locations, while a great number of migrants return to rural areas after having spent several years away from their native villages.

Figure 1: Map of the Study Sites



Source: Google Maps <<http://www.google.co.th/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&rlz=>> Accessed on October 15, 2016.

Methods to obtain data for this research were mixed. Three villages in the Khon Kaen Province were selected, based on ‘proximity’ of these villages to the urban centre of Khon Kaen. The village community is the lowest unit of state administration, usually comprising about 100-200 households and the cluster of houses is surrounded by agricultural lands. In each village there is a head of village (*pu yai ban* ผู้ใหญ่บ้าน) appointed by the state. Above the village are sub-districts, usually comprised of around 10 villages; and district, which are comprised of about 10-15 sub-districts.

Focus group discussions were conducted in order to obtain general, historical backgrounds related to migration, changes that have taken place and views of people regarding migration and well-being. The second step was a questionnaire survey of 105 households, or 28 per cent of the total households across the three villages. This was then followed by a subsample in-depth study of migrant experiences of 54 first generation (migrated between 1980 and 1994) and 97 second generation (migrated between 1995 and 2012) migrants, 151 in total. In these in-depth interviews we took pains to explore with our respondents their subjective well-being using two entry points: their self-reported life satisfaction and the nature and condition of their relationships with other people, both members of family and not.

The following section presents findings and discussion around the salient issues that emerged from our analysis.

4. Results

4.1 Migration in Rural Transformation Process

The Northeast of Thailand is the poorest region, where the average income of households is the lowest. Poverty in this region has been conceived to be associated with poor natural settings, i.e. poor quality of soil and paucity of water. To meet growing household needs, villagers from the Northeast have, for about half a century, travelled to other more prosperous parts of the country (in particular, Bangkok and the Central Plains) as circular labour migrants, remitting a portion of their income to sustain livelihoods in the settlements of origin (see Funahashi 2009; Grandstaff 2008; Shigetomi 2004; Rigg and Salamanca 2011; Rigg et al. 2012).

The studied sites Ban Don Hun, Ban Nawah, and Ban Na Dokmai of Khon Kaen Province, conform to this general characterisation: they are long-established farming-focused settlements which, notwithstanding some diversification of the farm economy, have increasingly come to rely on migration to sustain livelihoods, since the 1970s. While at the time of our survey in late 2012 the large majority of households still owned land (81 percent) and grew rice for home consumption (79 percent), a similarly large proportion of households also contained family members who had temporarily migrated to work

outside the village. Indeed, for many households the working sojourns of first generation migrants had been emulated by their children, who in their turn had become second generation migrants. The interlocking of livelihoods across space had, by around 1980, become typical of these villages.

Although the three villages share common characteristics, they do have distinct historical paths concerning the wider transformational process. This is also true of patterns of migration and of the types of work that migrants from each village undertook, eventually having an influence and transforming each community differently.

Ban Don Han was founded about 120 years ago, and at that time the economy of Ban Don Han was self-contained. A major step of the incorporation of Ban Don Han into modern economy began with the adoption of cash crops, i.e. with kenaf in early 1960s, then followed by cassava and sugar cane. In the 1970s, people of Ban Don Hun migrated to work in Bangkok and took up different kinds of jobs. Some of them worked in the gemstone cutting industry, which later extended into Ban Don Hun during 1980s and 1990s. These workers returned home with skills learned from this industry and started up gemstone cutting workshops, employing a few hundred young workers from other villages in the Northeast of Thailand. The strong presence of gemstone cutting workshops in Ban Don Hun village resulted in the fall of cityward migration for a short while. However, after the workshops operated 3-4 years almost all workshops stopped their business, due to the decline of the gemstone industry. At present only a few young workers of Ban Don Hun perform gem cutting and polishing work, as cottage industry. While those who learned cutting and polishing skills have turned to engage in something else than gemstone work, the young generation continues to undertake migration to work in factories in close proximity to the village.

Like Ban Don Hun, Ban Nawah villagers mainly engaged in subsistence agriculture before the 1960s, and began to be incorporated into modern economy through the adoption of cash crops in the early 1960s. Seeking jobs outside the village as a means to earn extra (cash) income became common from the 1970s, and their destination was mainly Bangkok. However, workers from Ban Nawah were employed mainly in garment industries. In a process which mirrors that in Ban Don Hun, in the late 1980s some (mostly female) workers returned home to start their own small garment businesses in the village. Pieces of garment works were subcontracted from business owners in Bangkok to villagers who had acquired sewing skills in Bangkok and invested some of their income to purchase their own sewing machines. A great number of women took subcontract work. However, recently garment subcontract work has declined due to an increase in competition, often with better pay or more attractive work opportunities in the local area. Most of the women who were employed in subcontract garment work have turned to some other work, while

younger generations have been employed in sugarcane factories, or some other factories near the village.

Ban Na Dok Mai, the third village studied here, went through a similar stage of transformation to Ban Don Han in the 1960s, and people also migrated to seek jobs outside the village from the 1970s onwards. However, while migrants of Ban Don Han and Ban Nawah could reinvest their knowledge, skills, and resources acquired from migration, this is less clear in Ban Na Dok Mai. Migration of villagers from this village began at the same time as in Ban Don Han and Ban Nawah but the destinations of the migrants were more diverse. One group of male migrants worked in a furniture factory in Bangkok, others were employed in the construction industry, while a few went overseas as contract labourers. Among women migrants, the most common occupation was house maid. Of the skills acquired through these working experiences the only ones that could be readily redeployed in the village were those linked to construction, and small construction bands appeared both here and, also, in Ban Don Han and Ban Nawah.

Migration described above played a part of crafting transformation, one of which concerns land. Theoretically, it is predicted that the integration of rural sectors into the wider economy will eventually result in land accumulation; small holders will leave their lands and earn their living from their labour. From our observation, small holders in the three studied villages continue to own land, the proportion of landless households are around 5-7 percent of households in the village. In previous times, land was generally owned and passed down through the women's blood line. Land was abundant while human resources were scarce. For the past sixty years, Thailand's population has grown and pressures on land holdings of small farmers are now evident. Land was inherited and divided among siblings of the family, and therefore, are getting smaller. Households holding land smaller than 5 rai (12.65 acres) are struggling, and because it is too small, and generally is insufficient to feed the family, a number of them sold land, mostly to their relatives or among siblings. However, during the same period we found that a number of households bought land to maintain or increase the size of their holdings. A majority of those who bought new land were migrants who were successfully earning enough money (see quotes in the following sections). From our survey, the average size of land holdings in Ban Don Han, Ban Nawah, and Ban Na Dok-mai was 9.2 rai, 14.2 rai, and 11.4 rai respectively, while the average size of land holdings of agricultural households in Khon Kaen at large is 22 rai.

Small holders in the three villages persisted throughout the change of rural mode of production. For the past three decades we found that there is a strong presence of monocrop in the three villages; this began in the early 1960s with kenaf, then cassava and sugarcane. At present sugarcane is the main crop in the three villages, considering the size of land grown. Unlike paddy, sugarcane is solely destined to be the raw material of a sugar factory located near the villag-

es. Sugarcane growing farmers must attain quota, according to a form of sub-contracting where the amount of sugarcane to be delivered to the factory and the prices are agreed upon in advance. This system has developed a sophisticated hierarchy of land control. Big quota owners allotted their parts to small holder, who in turn, are under the command of the quota owners. To put it shortly, this system permits big agribusiness the access to agricultural lands of small holders, without dispossession. At present, large parts of land are sugarcane plots of which most are owned by small holders. A similar system is also established for other crops such as cassava, albeit without formal contract.

The second aspect of transformation we observed concerned labour arrangements within households. Interviewees usually reported that 'agriculture' is their main source of income, albeit members of households engaged in vast non-agricultural activities, ranging from factory work, casual construction work, to economic migration (to Bangkok or lucrative cities), etc. The diversification of livelihoods has one significant result, that most of the labourers fully engaged in agriculture are of the old-age group (from 50 years up). From our observation, this is evident in all three studied villages. When we asked about problems or challenges in earning a living in the village, villagers were frequently mentioning labour shortage in agriculture, especially in rice transplanting and harvesting. During the peak demand, daily wage of hired labour in the village could soar up to 350-400 Baht per day, excluding meals (lunch) and refreshments, which the employers must provide. This level of daily wage obviously exceeds the minimum daily wage stipulated by government (300 Baht per day). Most young people who remain in the village work in factories or local businesses that have been expanded over the past two decades. Traditional agricultural skills will eventually fade away with the old generation.

Labour shortage in agriculture has resulted in changes in agricultural practices and techniques. Villagers of the three studied villages continue to grow rice and rice is their staple food. However, because of labour shortage in agriculture, the planting techniques have been shifted from transplanting to seed spreading. Tractors are replacing hand-operated tractors to prepare land, draught animals have no longer been used for a number of years. The use of chemicals in agriculture has been growing more common, to control weeds, insects, and fertilize the soil. In addition, as mentioned above, there has been an increasing tendency of households to adopt monocrop practice, in this case, growing sugarcane. This type of agriculture allows the use of modern technology and human-labour saving.

To summarize, migration, together with the incorporation into modern economy, has induced changes in local communities. However, small holders continue to be the main type of rural producer, albeit, labour arrangements, agricultural practices, and technologies of rural households have been evidently altered. These small holders have been integrated into wider global markets;

they produce agricultural commodities for big agribusiness, meanwhile permitting a portion of household workers to earn off-farm incomes.

4.2 Migrants' Change of Values and Subjective Well-Being

In our survey, we asked villagers to rank the things that they valued as being important in their lives. Most important is land, while a house came second. As discussed earlier, land has been growing scarce, and villagers continue to cling on to agriculture, albeit having diversified sources of livelihoods. In this respect, most of the villagers value land as having the highest importance for their living, and this can be considered to be consistent with traditional value.

The rank of 'house' is very importance and behind land, which is somewhat consistent with traditional values, as shelter is a basic necessity for living. However, 'house' contains new meanings and new values. In the village we observed that lucrative and modern-style houses are usually owned by successful migrants, the more expensive and modern-style the houses, the higher the incomes earned from migration. We also observed that in the three villages there is only a small number of completed affluent modern houses, the majority are modified or rebuilt, but less expensive. Several houses are uncompleted; many houses seem to have been started and to have been under construction for several years, and however parts of the uncompleted houses have decayed. In addition, attached to the high value people have assigned to modern and affluent houses are modern appliances. Several years ago modern appliances such as refrigerators, stereo sets, televisions, etc., were considered as 'conspicuous' consumer goods, signifying social cultural status of people who owned them. At present these modern appliances are common.

The other three that were ranked rather, moderately, and less important were car, money, and mobile phone respectively. Car was something out of the scope of aspirations for the villagers. However, in recent years a car has become more affordable for some villagers, and ownership of a pick-up truck has been growing. Money is usually among the things villagers give a high rank to, however, money itself is not only a thing, but also a means to achieve something else. Finally, mobile phones in the village are now common, most members of the studied households own mobile phones. Migrants saw mobile phones as less important because it is a lot easier than before to own a mobile phone.

Table 1: Ranks of Important Things for Living (as Self-Reported).

Ranks	Types of things	Percentage of respondents
Most important (1st)	Land	42.1
Very important (2nd)	House	32.6
Rather important (3rd)	Car	26.2
Moderately important (4th)	Money	13.5
Less important (5th)	Mobile phone	32.8

The following quotes illustrate what we discussed above.

My family managed to save money to build a new house. Our community has also been developed regarding infrastructure. (Interviewee #2, male, 54 years old, Ban Don Han)

I think working migration brought development to our village. People have more money, assets such as a house, a cell phone, and land. After I moved back, I had my own house and the savings. Even if I'm not rich, I will never be deprived. (Interviewee #3, female, 66 years old, Ban Don Han)

I had money to build new house. I had my own land, and no debts. The village also got better. Migration helps our community to improve in many ways such as donating money to the Buddhist temple, building the village's infrastructure. (Interviewee #8, male, 34 years old, Ban Nawah)

I could earn higher income. I usually send money home and often come back to visit my family. However, I lost my father while he worked overseas, he died in Singapore. (Interview #9, female, 32 years old, Ban Nawah)

Migration helped my family, both in terms of social and economic status. I have a new house. [...] I noticed that migrants always send their money back to their family to build a new house. (Interview #56, female, 52 years old, Ban Na Dok Mai)

I have enough money to pay off the debts, and to build a new house. I can also support my daughter's education. (Interviewee #4, male, 58 years old, Ban Na Dok Mai)

It must be noted here that while land and house are the two items most frequently ranked as most important, the percentage of interviewees to name them are only 42.1 and 32.6 respectively. This indicates that there are a great number of people who do not prioritize land and house as their top item of importance. Likewise, things that most people prioritized to be rather or moderately important turn out to be less important for others. Rather than seeing this phenomenon as villagers continuing to cling on to traditional values, it will be more appropriate to say that values are more diverse. A number of people prioritized some other things as more important, albeit the aggregated frequencies are lower than that of land and house.

Change of values discussed above shapes the ways in which people choose to earn their living. Obtaining things they value highly (land, house, and others), it can be considered that their lives are fulfilled whereas depriving them from these can be considered as the opposite. Satisfaction in life is one common indicator of subjective well-being. This study continues to explore migrants' 'happiness'; a form of subjective well-being, divided into three periods of time, i.e., before, during, and after migration. We analysed respondent answers by subdividing to wealth, i.e., rich, middle, poor, and very poor (as stated by the respondents themselves). The table below shows the results.

Table 2: Reported Subjective Well-Being before, during, and after Migration
(in Percentage and Absolute Numbers)

Wealth	Before Migration			During Migration			After Migration		
	Very happy	Mode-rate	Not happy	Very happy	Mode-rate	Not happy	Very happy	Mode-rate	Not happy
Rich	3.1 (1)	5.6 (2)	9.4 (3)	0.0 (0)	7.7 (5)	5.6 (1)	9.5 (4)	2.6 (1)	5.0 (1)
Middle	59.4 (19)	75.0 (27)	40.6 (13)	94.1 (16)	47.7 (31)	66.7 (12)	81.0 (34)	50.0 (19)	30.0 (6)
Poor	34.4 (11)	13.9 (5)	50.0 (16)	5.9 (1)	41.5 (27)	22.2 (4)	9.5 (4)	42.1 (16)	60.0 (12)
Very poor	3.1 (1)	5.6 (2)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	3.1 (2)	5.6 (1)	0.0 (0)	5.3 (2)	5.0 (1)
Total	100.0 (32)	100.0 (36)	100.0 (32)	100.0 (17)	100.0 (65)	100.0 (18)	100.0 (42)	100.0 (38)	100.0 (20)

The table above clearly pronounces the division between the rich and the poor; happiness of the rich increases through the course of migration, which is in contrast to that of the poor and the very poor. A greater proportion of the rich is very happy after migration than that during and before migration. On the contrary, greater proportions of the poor and the very poor are not as happy after migration, compared to the proportions before and during migration. The middle-wealthy reported moderate levels of happiness before migration, while rating very happy – the highest of all groups – during migration; rating as very happy also remains relatively high after migration. The explanation and interpretation could be that inequality generated through the transformation process is associated with both material and non-material aspects. Previously, land, labour, and some cultural resources were highly valued and were symbols of the elites. Under the course of transformation, the rich or the elite were more able to invest these resources in order to maintain the ‘elite distinction,’ even though values were also altered. The rich and the middle-wealthy are more able to invest their resources to support their family members in migration; therefore they are more able to attain their goals. After migration the rich can own modern houses, cars, and expensive modern appliances. These become part of things that people value as important to their lives. Reaching this is apparently still far away for the poor, as was illustrated in the previous section, which looked at uncompleted houses (under construction) decaying as it took a long time for the poor to complete them.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Rigg, Promphakping and Le Mare (2014) in their recent paper argued that the ‘middle income trap’ and the structural characteristics of Thai society have been individualized down to people at the bottom level. Numerous migrants

returned home but skills they acquired from industry are of little value and use in their natal villages. However, changes in rural villages are evident; the presence of mono-agriculture that permits agribusiness to make use the land of the rural producers, changes of agricultural practices and technology, changes of labour arrangement of rural producers, and hence diversity of rural livelihoods, etc. These changes are well captured in previous studies (Arunotai et al. 2007) but these appear to focus on the material aspects of transformation. This paper goes further to discuss changes concerned with non-material aspects, i.e., things that are considered to be important to their living and subjective well-being of rural people. During the course of transformation, people of rural villages have reprioritized things they consider to be valuable for their lives, and this becomes articulated as the figuration of the rural village (according to Elias's terms). The new figurations have shaped the availability of options to earn a living and the choices people made. The new figuration also shapes the availability of resources to be deployed to achieve their goals, especially concerning social and cultural capital.

The uneven satisfaction in life or happiness, between the rich and the poor exemplifies the idea of class distinction of Bourdieu (1996). Individuals who had migrated from rural villages were entering into a battlefield or playing field, a perpetual competition over the appropriation of the most distinguished objects or practices. Around twenty years ago, things such as land-phones and refrigerators were considered to be significations of wealth (Clarke 2006), whereas at present mobile phone and fridges are common and no longer considered of high value. In order to achieve well-being rural people are striving to acquire things that they value and the rich are better able to satisfy their wish. In this respect, the transformation was not only propelled by change in 'production'; the source of rural change is also driven by 'consumption.' The transformation drove them to migrate, while the things they brought back and their form of consumption further transformed rural landscape. However, under such a general path of transformation, there are immensely distinct trajectories for specific villages, groups, or individuals. These trajectories of transformation cannot be captured by the end results, but must be taken into account when considering all the processes and histories that transcend space and time.

6. Recommendation

- 1) The transformation discussed in this study suggested that rural villages will continue to persist, even though the roles of rural areas and agriculture may be altered. It is necessary to reconsider the whole development policy towards rural agriculture, which usually gave rural areas a lower priority. Study of new or alternative functions of agriculture beyond the conventional ideas should be promoted, and development policy must be

reformed, not only to create a new balance, but also to recognize the new roles and functions of rural villages that evolved through the transformation process.

- 2) This study found that migration is not necessary to provide relevant skills for migrants, especially after they return home. It is recommended that the Ministry of Labour provide opportunities to acquire necessary skills for return migrants. It is also important that innovations and technologies of agriculture be developed while taking into account the aging agricultural workers.

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